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ON PAGE 1

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Spy case fallout: suspension of US-Israel intelligence-sharing

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Routine intelligence exchanges between the United States and Israel have been "temporarily suspended" in the wake of the Pollard spying affair, senior officials here confirmed yesterday.

Officials stressed that high-level political and military contacts between the two countries have continued despite the arrest in Washington Nov. 21 of Jonathan Jay Pollard, who is charged with selling military secrets to Israel.

But what one knowledgeable Western source described as "informal meetings" between the two nations' intelligence communities have stopped.

The suspension demonstrates that despite Prime Minister Shimon Peres's qualified apology Sunday for the incident, damage may have been done to the close working relations between Israel and the US that will be difficult to repair.

A team of American officials, headed by Judge Abraham Sofaer, is due to arrive in Israel over the weekend to question Rafael Eitan, former Israeli government adviser on terrorism, and two Israeli diplomats, all of whom have been mentioned in connection with the spying affair.

Officials here expressed hope that once the American investigation is completed, relations between the intelligence communities of the two nations will gradually return to normal.

"It is only natural that some contacts are temporarily suspended," said a senior official who requested anonymity. "The decision is not in the nature of a sanction. For the time being, the routine meetings won't take place until the [American] delegation has completed its mission."

Over the years, Israel's strategic cooperation with the US has had its ups and downs. The two nations signed a Memorandum of Intent for Strategic Cooperation in 1981, but that agreement was canceled by the US after Israel annexed the Golan Heights from Syria in Dec. 1981.

The Strategic Cooperation Agreement was revived by the two governments in 1983. And in November 1984 Israel and the US signed an agreement to meet every six months and discuss areas of mutual military and intelligence interests.

In the past, the two nations have held joint military exercises. Israel last year was also invited by the US to participate in research on the Strategic Defense Initiative, the administration's program of research into space-based defense.

The first post-Pollard strategic meeting between the two nations took place last week. It was a session of the Joint Mil-

tary and Political Group, held in Washington. Israeli officials were pleased that it had not been cancelled by the US.

The meetings that have been cancelled, sources here confirm, are with the Intelligence and Research unit of the State Department.

"I won't tell you that I'm happy about it," said the senior Israeli official. "I am not happy about this whole affair. But I do not think this means there is a fundamental change in [US] policy."

Both Israeli and American sources point out that the two nations share many strategic, military, and intelligence needs in the region and that it would be unlikely that they would stop sharing counter-terrorism information and other information for long.

Officials in the Prime Minister Peres's office say they remain convinced that US Secretary of State George P. Shultz and other senior administration figures are eager to put the Pollard case behind them.

Israel has reportedly agreed to let the Americans see all the documents Pollard passed onto his Israeli contacts, in addition to allowing the interviews with Eitan and the two Israeli scientific attaches who were recalled from New York and Washington the day after Pollard was arrested.

According to Western and Israeli reports, Eitan heads a unit within the Defense Ministry known by the Hebrew acronym LEKEM.

The unit originally was formed to collect scientific and technological data through Israeli embassies and consulates. It is believed that it was this unit that hired Pollard some 18 months ago.

In Israel's apology to the Reagan administration, LEKEM was not mentioned by name. But the government said that if the allegations against Pollard proved true, the unit involved would be dismantled.